

Message Text

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AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 21617

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT ENDS FIRST SESSION. WHAT OF ITS
FUTURE?

1. SUMMARY: THE NEW PARLIAMENT JUST COMPLETED THE FIRST TENTH OF ITS FIVE-YEAR TERM WITH ONE OF THE MOST LACKLUSTER PERFORMANCES IN RECENT MEMORY. ON THE FEW ISSUES WHICH DID ATTRACT ATTENTION, THE GOF APPEARED SOMEWHAT DEFENSIVE, EITHER TOWARD THE GAULLISTS OR THE OPPOSITION. THE PRESIDENT'S ACTION HAS NOW TURNED TO THE NON-PARLIAMENTARY ARENA, WHERE THERE SUPERFICIALLY APPEARS TO BE A GROWING COINCIDENCE OF VIEWS BETWEEN THE UDF AND PS AND A WIDENING GULF BETWEEN THE UDF AND RPR. WE DO NOT EXPECT ANY CHANGE IN POLITICAL ALLIANCES NOW AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THESE TRENDS, BUT NEXT FALL'S BUDGET DEBATE WILL PROVIDE THE RPR WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW JUST HOW FAR IT INTENDS TO DISTANCE ITSELF FROM THE GOF. INCREASING COMPLAINTS FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE AISLE ABOUT BARRE'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
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POLICIES WILL CONTRIBUTE TO SPECULATION ABOUT AN ABBREVIATED LIFE SPAN FOR THE PRESENT ASSEMBLY, WHICH IN PRINCIPLE RUNS UNTIL 1983, TWO YEARS BEYOND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. CHIRAC, WITH AN EYE ON THE ELYSEE AND HAVING ALREADY STAKED OUT AN INCREASING NUMBER OF AREAS OF DIVERGENCES WITH THE GOF (EC ENLARGEMENT IS ONLY THE LATEST), MAY NOT BE ABLE

TO RESIST THE TEMPTATION OF TIPPING THE BALANCE TOWARD DISSOLUTION. AND THE PS, WEDDED TO ITS LEFT IDEOLOGY, WILL NEITHER BE IN A POSITION NOR DISPOSED TO BAILING OUT A MAJORITY IN TROUBLE. NO CHANGE IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, THEN, BUT NO BETS FOR THE PERIOD STARTING NEXT FALL. END SUMMARY.

2. MODEST RESULTS: MANY THOUGHT, INCLUDING OURSELVES, THAT AFTER HIS MARCH LEGISLATIVE VICTORY, GISCARD WOULD FAVOR PARLIAMENTARY ACTION AS HIS PRACTICAL FORMULA FOR CONSTRUCTING HIS LONG-TOUTED CENTER/LEFT. IF HE INTRODUCED AMBITIOUS REFORMS, AS HE HINTED HE WOULD DO, SO THE THEORY WENT, THE SOCIALISTS/MRG WOULD BE TEMPTED TO VOTE FOR HIS BILLS, THE GAULLISTS EM-BARRASSED AT BEST AND SPLIT AT WORST AND THE PCF ISOLATED. THE HOPED-FOR RESULT: THE NEW 246 MAJORITY WOULD GRADUALLY EVOLVE ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS COMBINING THE 123 UDF VOTES, 112 PS/MRG AND VARIOUS OTHERS WOODED BY GISCARDIAN REFORMS. SO MUCH FOR THE THEORY. PRIME MINISTER BARRE DID NOT IN FACT PRESENT A VERY AMBITIOUS PROGRAM OF REFORM, AND THE SESSION ENDED JUNE 30 WITH THE FOLLOWING AS ITS MOST MEMORABLE ACTIONS:

-- CHABAN-DELMAS' VICTORY, BASICALLY WITH UDF SUPPORT, OVER THE RPR CANDIDATE EDGAR FAURE FOR THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PRESIDENCY OF THE ASSEMBLY;

-- A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE ON BARRE'S GENERAL POLICY SPEECH, AFTER RPR PRECISIONS ON JUST HOW FAR THIS WRIT WOULD RUN; AND

-- A DEBATE ON AFRICA WHICH DWELLED AS MUCH ON OPPOSITION AND RPR CRITICISMS OF THE GOF'S PROCEDURES AND THE "NATOISATION" OF THE OPERATION AS ON THE TECHNICAL SUCCESS OF THE HUMANITARIAN ACTION.

IN OTHER WORDS, THE THREE ADMINISTRATION VICTORIES WERE AS NOTABLE FOR THEIR LIMITS AS FOR THEIR AFFIRMATIVE POINTS.

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3. THE NON-PARLIAMENTARY ARENA: GIVEN THE LIMITS OF
PARLIAMENT (AND PERHAPS EVEN OF A PRESIDENTIAL WILL)
ON A PROGRAM OF REFORM, THE PRESIDENT HAS TURNED BACK
TO THE LESS FORMAL PUBLIC AND POLITICAL ARENA. IN
HIS JUNE 14 PRESS CONFERENCE, FOR INSTANCE (PARIS
19199), GISCARD PROPOSED FOUR SPECIFIC REFORMS. THESE
WILL PRESUMABLY BE FOLLOWED UP BY GOVERNMENT BILLS,
BUT FOR THE TIME BEING THEY ARE BEING DEBATED BY THE
PRINCIPAL PLAYERS IN THE PRESS, RADIO/TV, AND SPEECHES.
THREE OF THE FOUR PROPOSALS HAVE NOT ONLY RECEIVED
THE APPROVAL OF THE PS, BUT THIS PARTY EVEN CLAIMS
THEIR PARENTAGE. THE SAME THREE HAVE BEEN REJECTED
BY THE RPR. A SEPARATE ISSUE, THE ENTRY OF SPAIN INTO
THE EC, WILL IN ALL LIKELIHOOD RECEIVE THE SUPPORT,
WITH THE NECESSARY RESERVES, OF THE PS, WHILE RPR
PRESIDENT CHIRAC CAME OUT SQUARELY AGAINST ENTRY IN A
JULY 1 SPEECH IN WINE COUNTRY IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE.
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A FINAL INDICATOR: THE PRESIDENT HAD INVITED THE
LEADERS OF THE FOUR MAIN FORMATIONS TO MEET AT THE
ELYSEE JULY 4 AND 5 TO DISCUSS THE BREMEN AND BONN
SUMMITS; MITTERRAND MADE A SURPRISINGLY CONCILIATORY
STATEMENT AFTER HIS MEETING ON THE UTILITY OF SUCH

CONSULTATIONS, WHILE CHIRAC'S TOTAL SILENCE HAS BEEN READ AS THE SIGN OF YET ANOTHER UNFRIENDLY SESSION.

4. SUPERFICIAL CONCLUSIONS: DO THE ABOVE EVENTS OF THE LAST THREE MONTHS MEAN THAT FRANCE IS HEADED TOWARD A UDF/PS MAJORITY IN PRACTICAL TERMS, OUTSIDE ARLIAMENT BUT POSSIBLY TO BE CONFIRMED DURING THE FALL SESSION, AND THAT THE RPR IS MOVING TOWARD THE OPPOSITION? ANSWER: IT WILL TAKE MUCH MORE THAN THESE STEPS TO GET ANYWHERE CLOSE TO GISCARD'S GOALS. THE PS MAY BE QUITE CONTENT TO SEE THE GOF INTRODUCE IDEAS THE PARTY CAN SUPPORT. SUCH A COURSE NOT ONLY ALLOWS THE PS TO DEVELOP A LINE MORE CLEARLY INDEPENDENT OF THE PCF BUT IT WIDENS DIVISIONS WITHIN THE MAJORITY. HOWEVER, THE PS DOES NOT CONFUSE OCCASSIONAL SUPPORT WITH A NEW ALLIANCE AND IN FACT BRANDS GISCARD'S INITIATIVES SO FAR AS MERELY GADGETS. HARDLY A DAY GOES BY WITHOUT SOME PROMINENT MEMBER OF THE PS REPEATING THAT THE EPINAY LINE REMAINS THE ONLY VALID ONE, THAT A RUPTURE WITH CAPITALISM IS NECESSARY TO CONSTRUCT AN EQUITABLE SOCIETY AND THAT UNION WITH THE PCF IS THE ONLY CONCEIVABLE ROUTE TOWARD THIS GOAL. PERHAPS THE PS DOTH PROTEST TOO STRONGLY, BUT IF ITS LEADERS' WORDS IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CAN BE BELIEVED AT FACE VALUE, IT IS NOT AT ALL PREPARED TO MAKE THE JUMP FROM PERIODIC TO RELIABLE SUPPORT OF THE GOF NOR TO COME TO GISCARD'S RESCUE IF RELATIONS WITHIN THE MAJORITY WORSEN. SOME PS PEOPLE TELL US

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THEY ARE ALREADY CONCERNED AT THE NUMBER OF ISSUES WHERE THEIR VIEWS CONVERGE WITH THE UDF.

5. NOR, DESPITE THE GROWING NUMBER OF AREAS OF DIVERGENCE BETWEEN THE TWO MAIN BLOCS OF THE MAJORITY, CAN ONE CONCLUDE THAT THE RPR IS HEADING GRADUALLY BUT SURELY INTO THE OPPOSITION. IT IS TRUE THAT, IN ADDITION TO THE DIFFERENCES MENTIONED ABOVE, THE RPR HAS LEVELED ITS HEAVY GUNS ON BARRE'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRAM, PARTICULARLY AS IT AFFECTS UNEMPLOYMENT AND INFLATION. BUT CHIRAC HASTENS TO ADD THAT EVERYTHING SEPARATES HIS GROUP FROM THE LEFT AND THAT WHILE HE RPR MAY DIFFER WITH THE GOF ON THE MEANS, IT AGREES WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S GOALS. THE QUESTION REMAINS, HOWEVER, OF HOW LONG CAN TWO PARTIES CONTINUE TO DIFFER ON THE MEANS WITHOUT CONCLUDING THAT THEIR GOALS ARE NO LONGER THE SAME. THE PRIME MINISTER, IN A LENGTHY INTERVIEW IN THE JOURNAL (RHONE-ALPES) OF JULY 5, ANSWERED CHIRAC'S CRITICISMS BY REFUSING TO BUDGE ONE INCH ON THE GOF'S NEOLIBERALIST POLICIES.

THUS, WHILE THERE IS NO QUESTION OF CHIRAC WITHDRAWING FROM THE MAJORITY AT THIS TIME, THE LINES BETWEEN THE GOF AND THE RPR ARE FAIRLY CLEARLY DRAWN. CHIRAC HAS FIRED A NUMBER OF WARNING SHOTS AND HAS EXPRESSED HIS PARTY'S POSITIONS PUBLICLY IN SUCH A WAY AS TO REAP BENEFITS IN THE FUTURE, SHOULD BARRE'S PROGRAM TURN SOUR LATER THIS YEAR OR NEXT YEAR.

6. AN AUTOMATIC MINORITY?: WHAT ARE THE CHANCES OF THE GOF LOSING ITS HARD-LINE RPR SUPPORT BEFORE 1981 (GIVEN THE HIGHLY UNLIKELY POSSIBILITY OF PICKING UP THE MODERATE PS/MRG); OR IN OTHER TERMS, WHAT ARE THE CHANCES OF A DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT BEFORE THE

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PRESIDENTIALS? MOST OBSERVERS EXCLUDE SUCH A POSSIBILITY FOR NEXT FALL AND PROBABLY BEFORE 1981. CHIRAC IS IN NO POSITION TO TAKE SUCH RISKS, NOR THE BLAME FOR BRINGING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT. HIS POPULARITY, ACCORDING TO AN UNPUBLISHED FIGARO POLL, IS AT A NEAR ALL-TIME LOW. AND GISCARD, THEY ADD, IS CLEVER ENOUGH NOW NOT TO GIVE CHIRAC ANY GOOD REASON TO PROVOKE A CRISIS.

7. WE WOULD AGREE WITH THIS ASSESSMENT, ALTHOUGH A MINORITY OPINION WOULD VENTURE THAT THE CHANCES FOR DISSOLUTION ARE 50-50 BY 1981. WE HAVE HEARD THIS CONVICTION FROM A NUMBER OF CONTACTS ON THE RIGHT AND LEFT. SINCE THE TIME FRAME COVERS THREE YEARS, THE REASONS TO SUPPORT THIS OPINION ARE SUBJECTIVE AND PROSPECTIVE. IT IS MORE A QUESTION OF CLIMATE, SOMETHING THAT WAS FELT AT CHIRAC'S LAST RALLY, AT CASTELNAUDARY ON JULY 1. THERE, CHIRAC CAMPAIGNED AS HE DID
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DURING THE HOTTEST DAYS OF THE LEGISLATIVE CAMPAIGN, NOT ONLY REJECTING SPANISH ENTRY BUT POSING AS THE PRINCIPAL DEFENDER OF FRENCH INTERESTS, PRESTIGE AND FUTURE. GISCARD AND BARRE'S NAMES WERE ROUNDLY BOOED. THIS RALLY WAS ONLY THE SECOND OF A SERIES BEING ORGANIZED BY THE RPR, BUT IT ALREADY SHOWS THAT THAT PARTY HAS NOT SLOWED ITS EFFORTS IN ANY WAY SINCE MARCH TO CONSOLIDATE AND GAIN GROUND IN PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT ELECTIONS (WHENEVER THEY MAY BE). THE SAME IS TRUE FOR THE PS AND PCF. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE UDF IS ORGANIZING SLOWLY AND IS HARDLY PRESENT IN THE PROVINCES WE HAVE VISITED.

8. CONCLUSION: WHAT COUNTS OF COURSE IS NOT THE TEMPORARY UPS AND DOWNS OF THE VARIOUS PARTIES BUT THE FINAL RESULTS IN 1981. AND GISCARD AND THE UDF HAVE ALREADY SHOWN BEFORE LAST MARCH THAT THEY KNEW HOW TO FINISH STRONG IN THE HOME STRETCH. THE COURSE PROMISES TO BE VERY DIFFICULT BECAUSE OF GISCARD'S CONVICTION THAT REFORMS ARE SUPPORTED BY A MAJORITY OF THE FRENCH PEOPLE AND THAT THESE REFORMS ARE THE BEST WAY TO BREAK DOWN ARTIFICIAL POLITICAL LINES. THE MORE HE PURSUES THE CENTER/LEFT, THE MORE HE ANTAGONIZES HIS BIGGEST BLOC OF NOMINAL SUPPORTERS. CHIRAC WARNED THE PRESIDENT DURING THE CAMPAIGN, WHEN THE UDF WAS FORMED, THAT HE RAN THE RISK OF ENDING UP WITH A GOVERNMENT WHICH ONLY REPRESENTED ONE-FOURTH OF THE FRENCH ELECTORATE. FRANCE IS ALREADY A FEW STEPS CLOSER TO THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS ON THE PROGRAMMATIC FRONT; THE FALL BUDGET DEBATE WILL PROVIDE THE NEXT MAJOR OCCASION TO MEASURE PARTY SUPPORT FOR THE GOF. BEYOND THAT, CHIRAC'S PERSONAL AMBITION WILL BE A MAJOR FACTOR IN HIS PARTY'S STAND. WILL HE STAND IDLY
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BY WHILE GISCARD SLOWLY BUT SURELY PREPARES ANOTHER SEVEN-YEAR TERM ON THE BASIS OF ANOTHER MAJORITY? THOSE WHO REPLY "YES" EMPHASIZE THE LIMITS ON CHIRAC'S ACTIONS. OTHERS FEEL THAT CHIRAC IS STAKING OUT HIS PAWNS FOR THE ULTIMATE BATTLE BEFORE 1981, THAT HE IS NOT A MAN PATIENT ENOUGH TO WAIT TEN YEARS FOR HIS CRACK AT THE ELYSEE, THAT HE WILL BE WILLING TO BRING THE WHOLE MAJORITY HOUSE DOWN AT SOME POINT AND ON SOME WELL-CHOSEN ISSUE, AND THAT HE WILL DO SO THINKING HE CAN CONVINCE THE FRENCH ELECTORATE THAT HE DOES SO AS THE TRUE DEFENDER OF FRENCH INTERESTS. OBVIOUSLY, THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF BARRE'S PROGRAM WILL FIGURE IMPORTANTLY IN CHIRAC'S DECISION. IF THE RESULTS OF THIS PROGRAM ARE AMBIGUOUS, AN INTERMEDIATE STEP IS ALWAYS OPEN TO THE RPR: LIMITED PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT WITHOUT PARTICIPATION IN THE GOF, ALONG THE PCI MODEL. WE REPEAT, NONE OF THESE EVENTUALITIES IS IMMINENT, BUT THE POLITICAL CLIMATE HAS CHANGED SINCE LAST MARCH AND PARTY LEADERS ARE WEIGHING EVERY MOVE FOR ITS PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES IN 1981.

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